



Fix Excel 2003's RAND Function

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By Neil J. Rubenking

In December, PC Magazine reader and Excel maven Earl Takasaki brought a curious Excel bug to our attention: The RAND function in Excel 2003 may return negative numbers. The problem shows up only in Excel 2003, not in earlier versions. To demonstrate this bug, open a new workbook and enter the simple formula =RAND() in cell A1. With A1 still highlighted, select Conditional Formatting from the Format menu. Leave the first drop-down list set to Cell value is, select Less than in the second one, and enter 0 in the box at the right. Click on the Format button and select Bold red text, click on OK, and click on OK again.

Now copy cell A1 to the Clipboard, click in cell A2, and press Ctrl-Shift-Down Arrow; this will highlight all the remaining cells in column A. Press Ctrl-V to paste the formula and formatting into those cells. Click on the header for column A to select the entire column and press Ctrl-C. Click on column B's header and drag to the right until columns B through T are selected, then press Ctrl-V to paste the copied cells. You now have over a million instances of the RAND() function. Press F9 to recalculate the worksheet several times. Before long, you'll find the sheet liberally sprinkled with negative numbers, easily recognized because the conditional formatting makes them stand out. The same bug affects the related RANDBETWEEN() function.

We brought this bug to Microsoft's attention, and a fix is now available via article 834520 in Microsoft's Knowledge Base (<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;834520>). If your use of Excel ever includes vast numbers of RAND() functions, perhaps for simulation purposes, be sure to get this fix.

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